

The Portfolio

By Hansini Fernando

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CHARACTERS

HANSINI FERNANDO.....the struggling college student

HER THOUGHTS.....they're kind of there

ASHLEY OKOSUN.....the first peer review partner

ACT I, Scene I

The Biography

[A questionably inhabitable dorm room, Monday morning, HANSINI and HER THOUGHTS]

HER THOUGHTS

Tell them about yourself! A brief summary, stick to the script, you'll be fine.

HANSINI

Sure, yeah. Easy. Just a brief introduction. Year, major, hobbies, all that stuff. Easy.

HER THOUGHTS

Yeah, easy. Go for it.

HANSINI

My name is Hansini Fernando and I hate talking. I'm a freshman here at the University of Georgia majoring in horticulture and I hate everything about being heard, being seen, and everything down to being perceived. It's childish, I'm aware, especially when I'm cowering behind my friends ordering in the winding line at Starbucks repeating the script for my hot chocolate over and over again. That's what helps me get by—the scripts strictly written in my head. They tell me how to act, how to carry myself, how to talk and how not to talk. I get thrown off when I'm not sticking to the script. I lose touch with the reality I've created in my head, and I stumble, I stutter, I mess up and simply can't hear my voice—

HER THOUGHTS

That's not the script, that's trauma dumping—

HANSINI

Right, right. Let me start over.

HER THOUGHTS

Yeah, start over.

HANSINI

I hate telling people about myself. It feels like I go wrong somewhere with it, and it always feels like I must defend something about myself from everything down to my race and the way I look. I'm a quiet person who likes talking to small groups of people. Strangers intimidate me and I default to scripts written in my head when I just have to talk to people. So, I'll tell you the basics about myself. I'm Sri Lankan and I grew up in North Dakota for eight years where I was born to immigrant parents. I lived in Mississippi for six years before we up and left to the Middle of Nowhere, Georgia (also known as Bonaire, Georgia) where I've been for four years. I don't do much. I read, I draw, I talk to a handful of people, I love gardening, and I'm a rather simple person.

Moving to Georgia was an experience for me. For fourteen-year-old me it felt like the entire world was lifted from my feet and I found myself stranded in a high school full of people who looked nothing like me. I never went to schools with people who looked just like me, leaving me culturally isolated, but this felt different. By the time the pandemic rolled around, I found myself doing my senior year online completely alone. Waking up felt like waking up in a black hole. My favorite subjects turned into horrible monsters I dreaded even seeing in my gradebook. My love for writing and reading dissolved and I would end up leaving twelve essays to write the day before they were due. To say the least, senior year was a struggle that truly killed my love for literature. I couldn't generate essays like I used to. I needed a strict script to stick to.

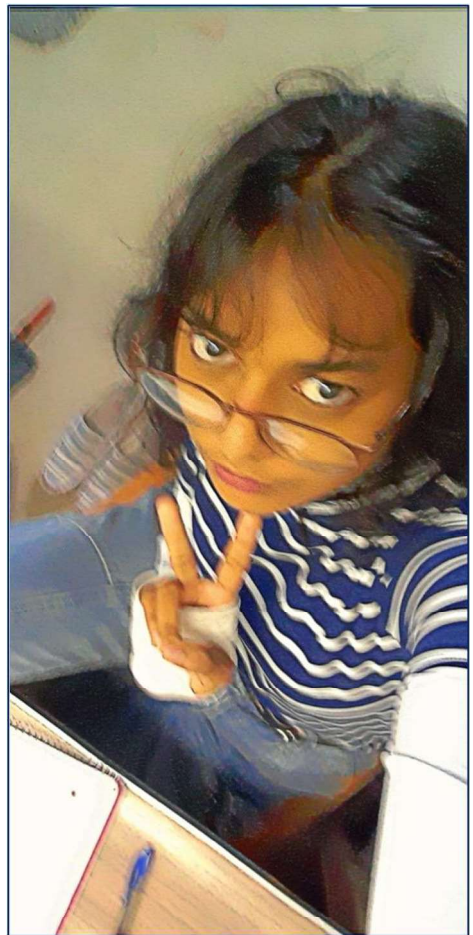
I needed the same default outline, the same monotonous writing voice with random synonyms from my pocket thesaurus to spice things up a bit, the AP Lit/Lang rubrics. I needed structure and I lost that, and I lost the voice of the model minority student I had in my head. I had no voice and no strictly structured script, but somehow going to college and walking into my tiny English 1102 classroom surprised me when I realized just how much everything would change for me, and all for the better as new adventures and escapades awaited me both inside and outside of the classroom that would force me to accept everything down to the color of my skin and my voice.

The expectations of covert racism and high school would finally stop meaning as much as they did to the shell of a person I used to be before college.

HER THOUGHTS

I mean that did the job, I guess.

[They exit]



Hansini moments before writing her biography